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MAXIM FOMIN

‘*Dá síortha gus an Innia...*’: what did Cú Chulainn say
to Conchobhar in *Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach*?

*Tá mise anois i n-arm is i n-éidigh
le n-imtheacht Dia Céadaoin go na hIndeacha Soir*
(An Stoc VII.2, 1929: 11)

It is true to say that there is no saga in the Irish manuscript tradition that has attracted as much attention as the one known as *Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach* ‘The Violent Death of the Sons of Uisneach’ (hereinafter OCU).

The narrative is contained in ‘ninety manuscript copies, with a further thirty-four incomplete and fragmentary copies’ (Ó Flaithearta 1995: 75), and since the publication of its most recent edition (Mac Giolla Léith 1993), four other manuscripts not taken into account by its recent editor were pointed out (Breatnach 1994–5: 208).¹

The history of the text is quite intriguing: the saga received more scholarly attention in the late-nineteenth – early-twentieth centuries than it had received throughout the rest of the twentieth century.

One can note its being dealt with by Stokes (1887), Cameron (1894), Dottin (1895), Kern (1896–7), O’Duffy (1898), Hyde (1899), Craig (1902), Mackinnon (1904–5), Breathnach (1910–1) while oral versions of the tale in Scotland were studied by Carmichael (1905). Earlier editions included those by O’Curry (1862), and especially by O’Flanagan (1808) to which I hope to return later.²

For a long time, reflecting opinions of Thurneysen (1921: 327), Hull (1942: 32) and others,³ the saga was perceived as a revision or a modification of an earlier compilation *Longes Mac nUislenn* ‘Exile of the Sons of Uisliu’

¹ Bruford (1969: 264) lists seventy-one manuscripts from the Scottish and Irish library collections, thirty-three copies of the narrative contained in the Irish Folklore Commission archive and two copies in the School of Scottish Studies archive.

² See Fackler (1969) who provides a useful survey of what he calls ‘Deirdre material for the writers of nineteenth-century Ireland’.

³ Máire Herbert (1992: 53).

(hereinafter LMU).⁴ However, this view was challenged by its recent editor (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 14)⁵ as well as by other scholars, including Breatnach (1994: 99).⁶

The Old Irish story of LMU is focused on a female protagonist called Deirdre, her birth, up-bringing, escape and death. She is torn between an old king of Ulster Conchobhar and her young lover Naoise, one of the three brothers of Uisneach. The three brothers and Deirdre go into exile to Scotland, then after a certain period they are invited to return, and when they do so, they perish at the hands of the vengeful Ulster king.

The Early Modern text of OCU opens with a feast at Eamhain Macha when Deirdre and the sons of Uisneach have already gone to Scotland—the compiler of the story expects the reader to know at least the beginning of the story, and is interested to furnish the well-known plot with a different end.

Whether the compiler is interested in taking a new twist on the figure of Fergus Mac Róich, a character who is sent by the Ulster king to bring the brothers of Uisneach back (the view expressed by Breatnach in 1994) or whether the compiler is concerned with the intrigue of ‘the struggle between Conchobhar’s desire for revenge and Deirdre’s attempts... to prevent him from exacting it’ (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 16), he very much depends on the reader’s ability to reconstruct for himself what happened in the prequel of the tale. OCU opens with the royal feast arranged by Conchobhar for the nobles of the province:

Do comóradh fleadh mhórchaoín mhóradhbhal la Conchobhar mac Fachtna Fháthaigh agus la maithibh⁷ Uladh archeana in Eamhain mhínálainn Mhacha...

An exceptionally fine and magnificent feast was held by Conchobhar son of Fachtna Fáthach and by the nobles of Ulster besides in smooth, beautiful Eamhain Mhacha... (Mac Giolla Léith 1993, 86-7)

All the more intriguing is the following detail. At the point when the introductory part of OCU concludes and Conchobhar succeeds in persuading the Ulster nobles to bring back the exiled sons of Uisneach, the reader is informed that only three persons can be nominated as sureties to carry out such a task. These are Conall Cearnach, Cú Chulainn and Fergus Mac Róich.

⁴ As a characteristic statement to support this belief, that by E. G. Quin (1959: 65) can be invoked: ‘I have now told you, I hope, about all the important forms of the Deirdre-story. For the Deirdre-story it is and always has been, in spite of the old titles’.

⁵ Cf. also Mac Giolla Léith (1994: 439): ‘OCU is not a later revision of LMU but a separate tale concerning the same characters and some of the same events but with significant, and in certain cases irreconcilable, differences in detail’.

⁶ Note also Edel (1993) and ead. (1996: 332).

⁷ I have changed *la maithe* of the edition to *la maithibh* following the emendation in Breatnach (1994: 211).

We need to be reminded that in the context of LMU, it is the sons of Uisneach who specifically request that Fergus Mac Róich becomes their surety, and the other two characters are not mentioned. In OCU, it is Conchobhar who selects the set of three sureties, and each one is given his chance to converse with the king; ultimately, it is the king who selects the surety to be sent for the sons of Uisneach.

The dialogue between Cú Chulainn and Conchobhar, and especially Cú Chulainn's answer, will be the central focus of my paper. How did Cú Chulainn respond to Conchobhar when requested by the king to get the sons of Uisneach for him? What governed the choice of those words? Can we explain the meaning of the phrases that Cú Chulainn had been credited with by looking at similar collocations in Irish writing?

Textual transmission of Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach

The story of OCU has circulated in Ireland in a variety of contexts and traditions—oral, hand-written, print, as well as post-print, and it is very appropriate that an attempt is made to focus on aspects of the textual transmission of the narrative.

A very rude outline of the legend is present... in the *Annals of Loch Ce* (H.1.19, Trinity College, Dublin) an entry for 1581 is annotated by a Brian MacDermot, who describes his melancholy condition as '... like Deirdré after the sons of Uisneach had been treacherously slain in Eamhain Mhacha by Conchobhar, the son of Fachtna'. (O'Curry 1861: 96, cit. in Fackler 1969: 58)

The succinct outline of the story appears in *Forus Feasa ar Éirinn*, the highly influential prose text of the Early Modern period written by Geoffrey Keating. Thurneysen (1921: 327), for instance, 'approves of Keating's good taste in adhering to the old version in his rendition of the tale' (Ó Flaithearta 1993: 75). It is to be noted that many copies of our text made good use of Keating's synopsis and copied his account by way of an introduction to the story, providing the missing episodes of Deirdre's birth, up-bringing, falling in love and escape to Scotland:⁸

K[eating] had a profound effect on the MS history of OCU in those sections... All of the many later MS texts of OCU which include these episodes borrow them from K[eating], more or less verbatim... (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 22, 56)⁹

⁸ 'This inclusion of K[eating]'s account of the earlier part of the life of Deirdre in many MS texts of OCU is hardly surprising as K[eating]'s *History* was the most popular prose text in the Irish MS tradition and there was considerable respect for its authority' (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 56). See also Mac Giolla Léith (1994: 442-4) on Keating as 'the single most important source of variation in the MS transmission of OCU'.

⁹ 'This, of course, is subject to the usual variation in the MS tradition e.g. corruption of personal names, addition of alliterative "doublets" and "runs", stylistic variation etc.' (ibid.). Mac Giolla

The editor of OCU suggests that the influence of Keating's compilation on the tradition of our text's transmission could hardly be earlier than the 1630s (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 57; see also Breatnach 1994: 112). However, the OCU compilation as a coherent text preceded the period when it underwent a systematic revision as a response to the influence of Keating's version.

The earliest extant manuscript witness to OCU, the National Library of Scotland MS Adv. 72.3.3, known as the Glenmasan manuscript, is of sixteenth century dating.¹⁰ It predates the mingling of the textual tradition of Keating's *Foras Feasa* with that of the text of OCU proper by more than a century, but it does not contain a complete version.

The second earliest manuscript witness to OCU, the RIA B IV 1 written by Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeannáin (c. 1671) contains neither the introduction nor the epilogue from Keating and thus can be taken as the version compiled when the mingling of Keating's and the OCU MS traditions did not yet take place.

Mac Giolla Léith (1994: 442) notes, however, that 'all of the MSS which contain OCU in its entirety postdate Geoffrey Keating's *Foras Feasa ar Éirinn*'.

The question to bear in mind is the relationship between the Keating version and every given manuscript in which a version of OCU is contained: one has to refer back whether it had borrowed its introduction or epilogue from Keating, and whether the compiler's approach to the story thus can be determined.¹¹

Beyond Keating, there is also a literary production which enjoyed enormous popularity. The 1808 edition of the saga by Therence or Theophilus O'Flanagan for the first number of *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Dublin* had a profound effect on the compilation and subsequent transmission of OCU. The *Transactions* was the official publication of the so-called Gaelic Society of Dublin, 'established for the investigation and revival of Ancient Irish literature'¹² and was also tasked with investigating the authenticity or otherwise of Macpherson's publications. This objective had further impact on O'Flanagan's approach to OCU—he included his critique of the Scottish scholar, noting in the prologue 'the vast liberties taken with the original by Mr. Macpherson'. He says he relied on Keating in supplying the details of 'the

Léith (1993: 24) also notes that variation in the ending of OCU is due to Keating's influence as well. On the nature of Keating's sources for the treatment of this material, see Breatnach 1994, 105.

¹⁰ Also confirmed by Bruford (1969: 47). Breatnach (1994: 105) proposes c. 1500 dating on the basis of the argument of Mackinnon (1912: 158-62) and Mackechnie (1963: 1.214-5). Mac Giolla Léith (1993: 29) refers to the unpublished work by Black who suggests 'that the MS appears to be a product of a school conducted by An Giolla Riabhach Ó Cléirigh (fl. 1512) and Dubhthach Ó Duibhgeannáin (d. 1511)'.

¹¹ See Breatnach (1994: 112) who argues that due to the authority attached to Keating's work, later scribes may have well treated OCU as a separate tale focused exclusively on Deirdre, thus separating the tale from its original context.

¹² The aims and objectives of the newly established society were printed on the cover page of O'Flanagan's 1808 edition.

birth and education of (*sic*) Deirdri',¹³ informing the reader that the story belongs to the so-called micro-cycle on the three sorrows of storytelling and provided his own version of the story. O'Flanagan, according to O'Curry (1862: 378, cit. in Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 49), 'took very great liberties with his text, in rejecting redundancies, supplying omissions, and changing the character of the orthography from the most modern commonplace to much more ancient forms'.

O'Flanagan included both the Old Irish and the Early Modern versions of the story in his publication, and this had an ultimate effect on the subsequent manuscript transmission of the Early Modern text.¹⁴ Mac Giolla Léith (1994: 449) informs us that at least ten OCU nineteenth-century MS versions 'are straight transcriptions of O'Flanagan' and the copy contained in the Egerton 662 was systematically emended to comply with O'Flanagan's edition.

Following O'Flanagan's suggestion, OCU came to be associated with two other narratives of a similar title and structure, *Oidheadh Chloinne Lir* and *Oidheadh Chloinne Tuireann*.¹⁵ Rudolf Thurneysen (1921: 327), Robin Flower (1926: 347-8) and James Carney (1950: 107-9) suggested that the three tales (*trí truagha na scéalaíochta* 'three sorrows of the storytelling') might have had a common origin. Mac Giolla Léith however provided an argument that 'the case for the common authorship (or redactorship) of these tales remains unproven' (Mac Giolla Léith 1994: 449-50, also id. 1993: 22-5).¹⁶

How Conchobar nominated sureties

Having thus looked at the problem of the OCU manuscript transmission, I move on to the text itself to discuss the passage attributed to Cú Chulainn. In the framework of the story, Conchobhar nominates sureties to fetch the exiled

¹³ However, O'Flanagan's version is different from Keating's, and he did not supply any detail regarding the sources.

¹⁴ Mac Giolla Léith (1994: 449) notes that O'Flanagan's publication had its effect on the Egerton 213 compilation of the story that 'uniquely includes a reference to Deirdre's miraculous cry from her mother's womb, which appears in LMU, but not in K[eating]... O'Flanagan is the more likely source for this episode'.

¹⁵ Mac Giolla Léith notes that 'the earliest MS in which the "Three Sorrows" appear together is Egerton 164 which was written in 1726-7... almost two thirds of the MS copies of OCU are unaccompanied by either of the other two tales' (1994: 449).

¹⁶ O'Curry's publication; publications by Alexander Cameron of 'The Tale of Deirdre: the Tragical Death of the Sons of Uisneach; or the Third Sorrow of the Three Sorrows of Storytelling', in *Reliquae Celticae* 2, 421-74 in Edinburgh in 1894 and by Séamus Ua Ceallaigh as *Trí Truagha na Scéaluidheachta* in Dublin in 1927 might have indirectly contributed to the dissemination of the hypothesis. See also Stelmach (2007) on the discussion of the reception of the LCU and OCU tales by the Irish Literary Revival figures, and of the *Deirdre* plays by G. Russell, J. M. Synge and W. B. Yeats based on these tales.

brothers of Uisneach, including Conall Cearnach, Cú Chulainn and Fergus Mac Róich.¹⁷ When Conchobhar inquires of Conall,

Créad do-ghéanta... dá gcuirinn ar cheann mac nUisneich tú agus a milleadh ar t'inchaihb agus ar t'eineach (mar) nach fobraim?

What would you do... if I sent you for the sons of Uisneach and if they were destroyed in spite of your surety and honour, a thing I do not propose to do? (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 90-1)

Conall rejects the king's proposition vehemently—once and for all:

“Ní bás aonduine (d)o thioctf(adh) de sin,” ar Conall.

“That would result not in the death of one man alone,” said Conall. (Ibid.)

Failing that, Conchobhar sends for Cú Chulainn and makes the same inquiry. Cú Chulainn replies:

“Do-bheirimse fóm bréithir,” ar Cú Chulainn, “dá sirdéasa (an domhan uile) gusan Innia n-oirthearaigh soir nach géabhainnse comha sa chruinne uaid acht do thoitim féin san ghníomh sin.”

¹⁷ In the saga, they appear as Cú Chulainn son of Subhaldamh (Cú Chulainn mac Subhaldaimh), Conall son of Aimhirghean (Conall mac Aimirghin) and Fearghus son of Ros (Fearghus mac Rosa). Note that Keating's version follows LMU, listing Fearghus son of Rogh, Dubhthach Daol Uladh and Cormac Conluingeas as sureties (Comyn 1901: 192-3). By and large, the folklore tradition did not reflect this development in the story. In Ireland, the only version where the king of Ulster sends his messengers to fetch the sons of Uisneach was collected by Seán Ó hEochaidh from Máire Nic Fhionnlaoich of Machaire Loisce on 31 May 1938 (NFC 509: 494-5) *Chuir sé cuireadh isteach ar Gholl Mhór a chéad uair. Chuaigh sé sin isteach agus d'fhiafraigh Conchubhar de dá ndéanfadh sé fill ar Chlann Uisne agus Deirdre thabhairt chuige-san. Dúirt sé sin le Conchubhair: Duine dá ndéanfadh fill ar Clann Uisne, dhéanfainnse conamar de cnámha, ní hé amháin mé féin a dhéanamh. Tchím, a dúirt Conchubhair, chan tusa mo chara. Chuir sé amach é agus thug sé isteach fear eile a rabh Feargus air. Rinne sé fhéin agus Feargus suas go rachadh Feargus, agus thug Feargus isteach go dtabharfadh sé chuige iad fá choinne fill a dhéanamh ortha.* 'The first time, he sent an invitation to Goll Mór. He went in and Conchubhar asked him if he could return the sons of Uisne and Deirdre and bring them to him. He told Conchubhar: The one who brings the sons of Uisne back, I would make broken bits of his bones, and this is not the only thing that I would do. I see, said Conchubhar, you are not a friend of mine. He sent him out and he brought another man who was called Fergus. They decided that Fergus would go, and Fergus yielded so that he would bring them to him so that they would be returned.' In other versions, Conchubhar either sends unanimous messengers to them (e.g. NFC S 1051: 263, collected from Máire Nic Fhloinn, Duibhlinn, Donegal, 1938) or he travels himself prompted by his adviser (NFC 210: 292, collected from Bean Uí Cathasaigh, Baile Glais, Mayo, 1936). The Scottish folklore tradition focused on the figure of Deirdre and exploits of Noise and his brothers in Scotland (SA SM1982.019, SA1964.83.B1 and SA 1964.28.A1). They return to Ireland voluntarily, instigated by Deirdre as she is feeling homesick in Scotland.

“I give my word,” said Cú Chulainn, “that if you searched (the whole world) as far east as Eastern India that there is no settlement in the world I would accept from you except for you yourself to fall by my hand on account of that deed.” (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 90-1)

‘Dá sirdéasa an domhan uile gusan Innia noirthearaigh soir.’ ‘If you searched the whole world as far east as Eastern India.’

In what way did different manuscripts reflect the phrase *gusan Innia noirthearaigh soir* ‘as far east as Eastern India’, and what variations can be observed when one compares different recensions of the text? Mac Giolla Léith divided the text into a number of recensions, all of which, on a closer look, manifest marked contrast with each other as to what actually was conveyed by Cú Chulainn in his response to Conchobhar’s request.

In Recension B1, Cú Chulainn provides a very short answer: *Adbert Concullainn na rachadh*. ‘Cú Chulainn said he would not go’.¹⁸ Recension B2 restricts the sphere of Cú Chulainn’s vengeance to Ireland:

Nior dhioghan dhuit chuig coige na hÉirionn na triucha ceada na Midhe gan do thuitim dom laimh.

Not the five provinces of Ireland nor the troops of Meath would provide you with shelter without you falling from my hand.¹⁹

O’Flanagan (1809: 28-31) in his edition has provided the following version of Cú Chulainn’s answer:

Da siorthasa sin formsa, agus a ttabhairt chugad chum a marbtha, nách aen-duine amháin do thuitfadh san n-gníomh, acht gach aen d’Ulaibh air a mbéirfainnsi báis acas gerr-shaeghail do thabhairt dhó.

That if you would ask that of me, and that they would be brought unto you to be slain, it is not one man alone that would fall for the deed, but every one of the Ultonians whom I should lay hold on should meet the sorrow of death and abridgement of life.

¹⁸ The recension is contained of four manuscripts: RIA 23 A 38 (compiled by Éamonn Ó Mathúmhna, Cork, 1809–12), RIA 24 C 16 (Eoghan Tóibín, Cork, 1814–5), RIA 24 A 22 (Micheál Ó hOrgáin, Cork, 1821), RIA 24 A 26 (Tadhg Mha Carrtha, aka. Timothy McCarthy, Cork, 1826), all postdating O’Flanagan’s 1808 edition, but observing no influence of it in this example.

¹⁹ The recension is contained in three manuscripts: Eg. 140 (compiled by Mathghamhain Ó Flanaganáin, Clare, 1766), King’s Inn 29 (Séamas Ó Murchadha, Meath, 1780), Eg. 171 (Lawrence Mac Alerny, Meath, 1790–1).

In his choice of wording for this passage, O’Flanagan was most likely guided by the manuscripts of the C and E recensions of Ulster provenance, that unanimously agree on the reading *dá síorthasa sin formasa agus a ttabhairt chugat* ‘that if you ask me this to bring them to you’.²⁰

Recension D resembles recension B1 in terms of its brevity as Cú Chulainn responds to Conchobhar: *Do bhuainn dhíot cionn féinn air sonn an gníomh sin* ‘I would chop your own head off on account of this deed’.

When we compare recensions which chose to include India within the sphere of Cú Chulainn’s power, where the latter threatened to find Conchobhar if the Ulster king decided to hide from Cú Chulainn after having committed the murder of the sons of Uisneach, these variants endow Cú Chulainn’s remarks with a different kind of detail highlighting a number of key characteristics.

Recension A manuscripts interpret Cú Chulainn as having had the West Indies in mind: *gus an Innia iartharaicc soir* ‘to Western India to the east’,²¹ whereas the manuscripts of recension B refer to India in the east: *gus an Innia n-oirthearaigh soir* ‘as far as Eastern India to the east’,²² that agrees with A1 and C2 recensions readings *gus an innia shoir* ‘to India to the east’.²³

²⁰ Such are the readings of the group of manuscripts that were penned by Muirís Ó Gormáin of Armagh between 1748–88 (recension C: Eg. 128, NLI G 133, NLI G 147, NLI G 482, recension E: Eg. 662) as well as those by Peadar Ó Doirnín of Co. Down (O’Lavery I), Ardell Hanlon, South-east Ulster (Maynooth M 103, c. 1762–4), Eóin Ó Gribhpin (Eg. Ir. e 4, c. 1799), Peter Lynch of Co. Down (BL Add. 18747, c. 1800). Two manuscripts postdate O’Flanagan’s edition and could have been inspired by it in their choice: NLI G 120 (compiled by Peter Ó Longáin, Ventry, 1849) and NLI G 495 (compiled by M. Brúnn, Lismore, c. 1844 or 1899).

²¹ Alternatively, one can take *iartharach* in its meaning of ‘remote’. These are readings of NLI G 113 compiled by Uilliam Mac Cartain (1709: *gus an innia iaritharaicc soir*; a copy of this version is contained in NLI G 90 compiled by Joseph Ó Longáin in the nineteenth century: *gus an innia iaritharaicc soir*), RIA E vi 4 by Pól Ó Longáin (Clare, 1727: *gus an innia iartharaicc soir*), Adv. 72.2.6 and Kilkenny MS (1738: *gus an innia iartharraigh soir*), RIA 23 N 21 by Micheál Ó Longáin (Cork, 1822: *gusan innia* (sic) *iartharaicc soir*), Mullingar 3 by Pádraig Mc Suibhne (Cork, 1773: *comgus an innia iaritharaigh soir*), RIA 23 B 21 by Micheál Óg Ó Longáin (Cork, 1824: *gusan inna iartharaicc shoir*) and RIA 24 L 24 by Tomás Ó Íceadha (Tipperary, 1833: *gus an Inia iartharaigh soir*).

²² See RIA 12 F 7 compiled by Uillioig a Búrc (Cork, 1750: *gus an innia noirthearaigh soir*; its copy contained in RIA 23 D 15 compiled by Mártan Ó Ceallacháin, 1755, reads *gus an inniaith oirthearaidh*); Eg. 141 by Séamus and Donnchach Ó Conaire (Cork, 1773–5: *gus an india noirthearaigh soir*), RIA 23 O 52 by Séamus Stúndún (Galway/Roscommon, 1801: *guisan india noindiart shoir*), RIA 23 E 9 by Concubhar Óg Úa Máille (Kerry, 1809: *gus an Innidia oirr traig*), RIA 23 C 36 by Seaghan Paor (Waterford, 1804–23: *aninniath oirthearaidhe*), UCC 96 by Labhrás Ó Fuartháin (Waterford, 1780: *gus an inia thoir thechtaidhe*), Maynooth M 51 by Eoghan A’tShíthigh, aka. Owen Sheehey (Cork, 1786: *gus an india ndor nding soir*), RIA 23 H 15 by Righrí Mac Raghnaill, aka. Roger Reynolds (1768–79: *gus a ninnia noirtheraic[h]ta soir*).

²³ See C2 recension MSS: BL Add. 18947 compiled by Seán Ó Réagáin (Cork, 1810: *da síortha gus an India shior*), 23 G 21 = 23 G 24 by Micheál Óg Ó Longáin (Cork, 1795–7: *ní fuil gus an innidia soir*), Maynooth M53 (e) by Micheál Ó Bhríain (1760: *nách bhfuil neach aso gus an india shoir*). An intriguing reading is provided by King’s Inns 5 by Daniel Fullerton (Cork, 1755: *da sirtheasaigh ingúlaighe on sóir agus síor an domhan* ‘if you were to search in coal-black land from the east and from the west of the world’). Eg. 164 by Pádraig Ó Doibhlin

The manuscripts that have not been assigned to any of the recensions provide the most illuminating readings of the passage. The editor of the text reconstructs the reading of the Glenmasan Manuscript as *da sirdeasa (...) gusan India noirrtir soir* (Mac Giolla Léith 1993: 148) whereas the actual reading after consulting the manuscript turns out to be slightly different: *da sirdeasa (...) sech gusan India noirrtir shoir* ‘if you were to search (...) past as far as India of the Orient to the east’,²⁴ and is close to the B recension. RIA B IV 1 compiled by Dáibhí Ó Duibhgeannáin in Sligo c. 1671 registers *agus sibhsi fein do dhol gusin Innia n-oirrdhearc soir* ‘and yourselves going to India of renown, eastwards’. Other complimentary epithets assigned to India by the Irish scribes included *an India óir oirdercaig*, ‘India of magnificent gold’ of BL Sloane 3154 compiled by Diarmuid Ó Conchubhair in Limerick between 1715–6, and also of TCD H. 3. 23 by Stephen Rice (c. 1718).²⁵

Description of India in Irish sources

How is India depicted in later medieval and early modern Irish sources and can one find similar epithets describing this land that could point us to the origin of the collocations analysed in the previous section?

Similarly to the readings of recensions A, A1, B, and C2, India is referred to as being in the east.

Luid Gaidel cain co na buaid / iársain sech India sair thúaid.

Fair Gaels went with victories then past India in the east to the north.
(Saltair na Rann 4005-8 = Rawl. B 502, 29a2)

In *Imtheachta Aeniasa*, Nestor telling about his battle with the sons of Priam in which the mighty strength of the Asians was assembled against them, lists the nations constituting Priam’s army:

laith gaili na n-uili Assia, ot[h]a in Scethia thuaiscertaig 7 in n-Innia n-oirtheraig 7 i nEitheoip ndeiscertaigh.

valiant men of all Asia, from Scythia in the north, to India in the east, and Ethiopia in the south. (Calder 1907: 33-5)

(Meath, 1726–7: *da ndeanta sín agus sir gus an india soir* ‘if you do this and seek as far as India in the east’) belongs to A1 recension.

²⁴ This reading is also reflected in RIA E IV 3 (Book of Ó Lochlainn) by Aindrias Mac Cruitín (Moyglass, Clare, 1727): *dá siorthása an domhain uile gus an India oirthioraigh* ‘if you were to search the whole world to eastern India’.

²⁵ The two manuscripts present developments of a common tradition in so far as BL Sloane 3154 appends a synopsis of Keating’s introduction to the end of the tale—which points at a composite character of this compilation, whereas RIA E iv 3 contains no Keating material, but is also of Southern provenance and supports the common reading.

The second most common characteristic of India is that it is a country full of treasures and riches,²⁶ and especially full of gold. In *Duanaire Finn* (DF lvii.16), Finn is described as receiving Indian gold as his tribute:

Lochland is an Innia mhór tigeadh a n-ór go teach Fhinn.

The gold of Norway and great India came to Finn's house. (Murphy 1933: 208)

In a poem '*Turus Osgair soir*' (DF xxiii.173; MacNeill 1908: 72), that describes Oscar's journey to the east, it is told that he was offered his share of gold from India (*do chuid óir na nInnidheach*).

Examples from bardic poetry include a citation from a panegyric by Flann, son of Eoghan Mac Craith (c. 1590) devoted to Queen Elizabeth of England, where he describes the royal fleet's exploits as follows:

*Bíth a haimréil ins an Ruiséil
cuid dá cathréim chomhgaraigh
téid a lucht gliaidh tar muir dToirrian
is don Innia órchlochaigh*

Her admiral frequently sails to Russia
A part of her triumph that lies at hand
Her fighting men travel across the Tyrrhenian Sea
To India, famous for golden ore. (Mac Erlean 1913: 72)

An eighteenth-century description of India contained in Tadhg Ó Neachtáin's *Eolas ar an Domhain* (1725) speaks about the geographical location of the country as well as enumerating its riches and resources:

§15. *Cionnas atá India suigte? Idar 82 c. agus 130 cé. don fhaide agus idir an 8 c/ 12 m agus an 40 céim don tuath-leithne. Tartaria don taobh thuath, China agus a muir don taobh shoir, an Mhuir Indiach don taobh theas, Persia agus an Mhuir Indiach don taobh shíar.*

§15. How is India situated? Between 82 and 130 degrees of longitude and between 8 s / 12 mins and 40 degrees of latitude. Tartaria is on the north side, China and its sea on the eastern side, and the Indian sea on the south side and Persia and the Indian sea on the western side. (Ní Chléirigh 1944)

²⁶ In the medieval Irish version of *The Letter of Prester John*, the king of India was described as the richest man in the world: *Et madh ail libh techt 7 ar cumachtaine 7 ar tirne d'fhechain, tuic 7 creid can cunntabairt gurop misi righ na hInndhia .i. en duine as saibhre i ngach uile innmus ata fo neimh 7 a talmain* 'And if you should like to come to see our power and our land, understand and believe, without a doubt, that I am King of India, that is, the richest man in all wealth that is under heaven and on earth' (trans. by A. Palandri; OIr. text cited from Greene (1952: 121).

§17. Agus is tír shaidhbhir thorramhuil a n-arbhar, a bhféar, a meas, a n-uisge, agus a n-aibhne í, agus a sléibhte ro-shaidhbhir a mínach óir agus airgid, go ceart gurab fhéidir ceiste na nIndiach do ghairm dhi; agus is iath roidhtheidh truaillidhe fásamhuil ionna himlibh (darab gnáth fonn creatha) í, agus í rannta 'na sé cóigighibh móra.

§17. This is a land rich and fertile in corn, in men, in mast, in water and in rivers, and its mountains are very rich of gold and silver mines, so that rightly it could be called an Indian thing; and the land is very hot and polluted, growing in the borders (so that the soil is used to quakes), and it is divided into six big provinces. (Ní Chléirigh 1944)

Ó Neachtain, describing India, did not obtain any first-hand information about the country. He drew upon the descriptions of the country current in various encyclopaedias and geographical dictionaries of his time: the early-modern image of India was still in the making. Two sources particularly contributed to Tadhg Ó Neachtáin's vision of the world in his *Eolas ar an Domhain*. These sources include *A Most Compleat Compendium of Geography* by Laurence Eachard (1691) and *Geography Anatomized* by Patrick Gordon ([1699] 1747) (Ní Chléirigh 1944: vii–ix).²⁷ Incidentally, both works distinguish three different parts of India (viz-à-viz Ó'Neachtain's 'six big provinces': e.g. Eachard 1715: '*India Propria*, the Country of the Great Mogul. *India Peninsula Intra Gangem*, the W[estern] part of *India* ... and *India Extra Gangem*'), and Gordon, for instance, endows each of the three parts with different characteristics in terms of their climate, social and religious customs, and exports. In comparison to Gordon's account of India, Ó Neachtáin's description is a garbled version based on various passages which he saw fit to borrow. For instance, he drew upon the geographical description of the Moghul part as well as parts of the description of the Southern India for his opening passage of India describing its location:

§1. *The Mogul's Empire*. This country, bounded on the East by *China*, on the West by *Persia*, on the North by Part of *Tartary*, and on the South by the Gulf of *Bengal*, is a great Part of the modern and ancient *India*. (Gordon 1747: 250)

§3. *The Peninsula of India beyond the Ganges*. This last Division of *India* (bounded on the East by *China*, on the West by the Gulf of *Bengal*; on the North by part of the *Mogul's Empire*; and on the South by some of the Indian Ocean) is termed *Peninsula Indiae extra Gangem*, or *India* beyond the *Ganges*. (Gordon 1747: 250)

Ó Neachtáin's description of the riches that abound in India, was taken solely from the part devoted to Southern India:

²⁷ I am grateful to Liam Mac Mathúna for pointing this out to me and for a thought-provoking discussion of the matter convened at NLI in July 2019.

§3. *Soil*. The Soil of this Country (it lying under the first, second, and third North Climates) is extraordinary fertile, producing in great Plenty [of] all Sorts of desirable Fruits and Grain; besides 'tis well flocked with invaluable Mines, and great Quantity of precious Stones; yea, so vastly rich in this Country, that the Southmost Part thereof (viz. *Chersonese a'Or*) is esteemed by many to be the Land of *Ophir*, to which King Solomon sent his Ships for Gold. (Gordon 1747: 250)

Conclusion

It can be surmised that the attributes which various compilers of OCU chose in their description of India immediately invoked the following associations: India was a country located in the east—*Innia shoir*, *Innia oirthearaigh* and it was a land that was magnificent and full of gold—*Innia n-óir oirdercaig*, and in doing so they have chosen to follow the practice established in the Irish tradition. Ó Neachtáin's view of India cannot be taken to represent that of the vernacular learned tradition, yet he drew upon a number of stereotypes creating an image of India highly appropriate in the context of his time.

The choice of the subject for the present article has been mainly governed by two factors. Firstly, the honorand of the present volume led the preparation of an anthology of Indian and Irish writings on diverse subjects of literature, history, mythology and folklore traditions between 2007–2018 (Mac Mathúna et al. 2018). Secondly, as President of the learned association *Societas Celto-Slavica*, he has been promoting the eastern European dimension of Celtic Studies which, since 2004, developed into a major network of co-operating Celtic departments. I wish him well in his future academic endeavours of which there are plenty, hoping, like on many other occasions, that they be successful and inspiring.

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Abbreviations

BL	British Library, London
DF	Duanaire Finn (MacNeill 1908; Murphy 1933)
LCU	Longes Mac nUislenn
NFC	National Folklore Collection, Dublin
NLI	National Library of Ireland, Dublin
OCU	Oidheadh Chloinne Uisneach
RIA	Royal Irish Academy, Dublin
SA	School of Scottish Studies Archives, Edinburgh
TCD	Trinity College Dublin

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